

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W
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O 141233Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2076

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PRAGUE 0411

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, SOPN, PINS, CSCE, SHUM, CZ
SUBJECT: DETENTION OF NYT CORRESPONDENT PAUL HOFFMAN

REFS A. VIENNA 1148, B. SCHMIDT-FROWICK TELCONS 2/12,
C. ARMITAGE-BYRNE TELCON 2/13, D. FROWICK-HOLBERT TELCON
W/13, E. VIENNA 1149, F. PRAGUE 0356

1. SUMMARY: THIS MESSAGE REVIEWS HIGHLIGHTS OF EMBASSY'S
EFFORTS OVER THE PAST WEEKEND TO ASSIST NEW YORK TIMES CORRESPONDENT
PAUL HOFFMAN, AFTER WE LEARNED OF HIS REPORTED REMOVAL SATURDAY
EVENING, FEBRUARY 12, FROM THE BERLIN-PRAGUE-VIENNA TRAIN AT
THE CZECHOSLOVAK-AUSTRIAN BORDER. REPEATED CALLS TO FOREIGN MINISTRY
OFFICIALS, INCLUDING A THREE A.M. CALL ON FEBRUARY 13 TO DEPUTY
FOREIGN MINISTER SPACIL, ELICITED ONLY REQUESTS THAT EMBASSY
DEFER THE MATTER UNTIL SUNDAY MID-MORNING. MFA FINALLY PROVIDED
AMBIGUOUS INFORMATION AT APPROXIMATELY 1400 HOURS FEBRUARY 13
THAT HOFFMAN "WAS NOT DETAINED IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA...AND HAD RETURNED
TO AUSTRIA." SHORTLY THEREAFTER, HOFFMAN TELEPHONED EMBASSY
PERSONALLY TO REPORT HIS ACCOUNT OF DETENTION AT THE BORDER
(REFTEL E) AND INDICATE THAT HE HAD RETURNED TO VIENNA AT ABOUT
11:30 A.M. WE BELIEVE THAT IN WAKE OF RECENT HARASSMENT OF
U.S. JOURNALISTS VISITING CZECHOSLOVAKIA, THE TIME HAS COME TO
RETALIATE. WE SET FORTH BELOW SUGGESTED ALTERNATIVES FOR
RESPONDING TO RECENT CZECHOSLOVAK ACTIONS. MEANTIME I HAVE ASKED
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FOR APPOINTMENT WITH FOREIGN MINISTER CHNOUPEK TO PROTEST THE
HARASSMENT OF OUR JOURNALISTS HERE, ESPECIALLY THE TREATMENT OF
HOFFMAN. END SUMMARY.

2. INITIAL CALLS TO MINISTRY. EMBASSY DUTY OFFICER FIRST
LEARNED OF HOFFMAN'S REPORTED DETENTION AT APPROXIMATELY MIDNIGHT
LOCAL TIME FEBRUARY 12. EMBASSY CONSUL WAS ALERTED AND EMBOFFS

TWICE CALLED MFA DUTY OFFICER TO TRY TO PURSUE THE MATTER THROUGH CONSULAR CHANNELS. EACH TIME, MFA OFFICER TOOK POSITION THAT NOTHING COULD BE DONE UNTIL MORNING. AFTER REF B TELCONS WITH DEPARTMENT, AMBASSADOR CALLED SPACIL TO UNDERSCORE OUR CONCERN OVER HOFFMAN'S REPORTED REMOVAL FROM TRAIN AND EMBASSY'S INABILITY TO ELICIT FROM MINISTRY DUTY OFFICER ANY HELP AT ALL IN LOOKING INTO THE MATTER.

3. SPACIL CALL. I ASKED WHETHER SPACIL COULD CONFIRM REPORT OF HOFFMAN'S DETENTION. IF SO, I REQUESTED INFORMATION ON HOFFMAN'S WHEREABOUTS, THE REASON FOR GOC ACTIONS IN DETAINING HIM, AND ASKED FOR HIS IMMEDIATE RELEASE. SHOULD HOFFMAN NOT BE RELEASED, I ASKED TO KNOW REASONS WHY AND REQUESTED THAT AN EMBASSY OFFICER SEE HIM AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. AFTER A NOTABLY LONG PAUSE, SPACIL SIMPLY STATED THAT IF HOFFMAN WERE DETAINED, IT WAS "FOR GOOD REASON,

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AND THAT THE MATTER SHOULD BE HANDLED THROUGH CONSULAR CHANNELS. I REPLIED THAA EMBASSY HAD ALREADY CALLED THE MFA DUTY OFFICER TWICE TO REQUEST SUPPORT IN OBTAINING INFORMATION ON HOFFMAN THROUGH CONSULAR CHANNELS, BUT TO NO AVAIL. THUS, I WAS OBLIGED TO CALL AT THIS HOUR TO BRING THE PROBLEM TO HIS, SPACIL'S, ATTENTION AND REQUEST MFA ACTION ON THE CASE. I NOTED THAT WASHINGTON WAS BECOMING INCREASINGLY CONCERNED BECAUSE THE HOFFMAN INCIDENT DID NOT APPEAR TO BE SOLELY A CONSULAR QUESTION BUT SEEMED RELATED TO THE RECENT PATTERN OF GOC HARASSMENT OF US JOURNALISTS. IT THEREFORE HAD SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS.

4. BEFORE I COULD FINISH AN ADDITIONAL STATEMENT THAT THE PRESENT
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SITUATION FACING OUR CORRESPONDENTS VISITING CZECHOSLOVAKIA APPEARED TO VIOLATE GROUND RULES ON WHICH US JOURNALISTS WITH PROPER VISAS SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO THEIR JOB HERE AND THAT CONTINUING HARASSMENT CONTRADICTS THE CSCE FINAL ACT, SPACIL INTERRUPTED TO REITERATE THAT THIS PROBLEM SHOULD BE HANDLED ON A CONSULAR LEVEL THE NEXT MORNING. HE SAID IT WAS NO AFFAIR TO BE BROUGHT TO ATTENTION OF A DEPUTY MINISTER. HE THEN HUNG UP ABRUPTLY.

5. MFA REPORT FEBRUARY 13. ON SUNDAY MORNING, EMBASSY CONSUL PRESSED MFA DUTY OFFICER FOR INFORMATION ON HOFFMAN, EMPHASIZING EMBASSY'S DESIRE TO SEE HIM IF HE WERE BEING HELD SOMEWHERE. AT THIS POINT, MINISTRY OFFICER NOTED HE HAD BEEN IN TOUCH WITH SPACIL AND OFFERED, IN GOOD ENGLISH, TO TRY TO OBTAIN CLARIFICATION ON HOFFMAN'S WHEREABOUTS AND PROMISED TO PROVIDE INFORMATION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. MFA INFORMATION WAS NOT FORTHCOMING UNTIL ABOUT 1400 HOURS, AND THEN EMB CONSUL WAS SIMPLY TOLD THAT "MR. HOFFMAN WAS NOT DETAINED IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA. HE IS NOT ON THE TERRITORY OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA. HE HAS RETURNED TO AUSTRIA." SUBSEQUENTLY, EMBASSY CALLED MFA OFFICER ONCE MORE TO TRY TO

CLARIFY THIS STATEMENT, SPECIFICALLY BY ASKING WHETHER HOFFMAN'S TRAVEL HAD BEEN INTERRUPTED IN ANY WAY AND WHETHER GOC OFFICIALS WERE IN CONTACT WITH HIM. MFA OFFICER SAID HE COULD NOT PROVIDE ANY FURTHER INFORMATION UNTIL THE NEXT DAY.

6. HOFFMAN ARRIVAL IN VIENNA. BETWEEN 1400 AND 1500 HOURS, HOFFMAN TELEPHONED EMBASSY FROM REUTERS OFFICE VIENNA, RECOUNTED HIS OVERNIGHT CONFRONTATION WITH THE CZECHOSLOVAK BORDER OFFICIALS, AND SAID HE HAD RETURNED TO VIENNA BY ABOUT 11:30 A.M. HE HAD ALREADY FILED A REPORT WITH NY TIMES. HOFFMAN, WHO HAD EMPHASIZE D TO ME ON FRIDAY EVENING HIS SATISFACTION WITH RESULTS OF HIS VISIT TO PRAGUE, STILL SEEMED CHIPPER DESPITE HIS DETENTION. HE TOLD DCM HE HAD NOT BEEN TREATED TOO BADLY, THOUGH SOME BORDER OFFICIALS "DID NOT OBSERVE COMMON COURTESIES TOWARD A PERSON 64 YEARS OF AGE."

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FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 PRAGUE 0411

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7. COMMENT: I BELIEVE THE TIME HAS COME FOR PROMPT USG REACTION TO THE CONTINUING ADVERSE TREATMENT OF US JOURNALISTS HERE--ESPECIAL Y IN THE HOFFMAN CASE (SEE REFTEL F). MOST SIGNIFICANT, RECENT EVENTS INCLUDE THE DECEMBER REFUSAL OF VISA TO MURRAY SEEGER OF THE LOS ANGELES TIMES, THE JANUARY HARASSMENT OF MICHAEL GETLER OF THE WASHINGTON POST, AND THE FEBRUARY BORDER-CROSSING EPISODES INVOLVING FIRST NBC NEWS CORRESPONDENT LESLIE COLLITT AND NOW HOFFMAN . WHILE NONE OF THESE EVENTS ALONE WARRANTS DRASTIC RETALIATION ON OUR PART, THE PATTERN THEY COLLECTIVELY REPRESENT DOES. IT REQUIRES US TO EXPRESS OUR DISAPPROVAL IN POSITIVE ACTION, SINCE OUR MANY WORDS OF PROTEST HAVE FAILED TO DETER THE GOC. I SEE THREE POSSIBLE LEVELS AT WHICH WE MIGHT RETALIATE:

(A) REFUSAL OF ONE OR MORE VISAS TO CZECHOSLOVAKS: THIS COULD INVOLVE JOURNALISTS, BUSINESSMEN OR EVEN AN IMPORTANT GROUP, SUCH AS THE BRNO SYMPHONY, WHICH BEGINS A US TOUR IN MARCH. (OF COURSE, REFUSAL OF SUCH A CULTURAL GROUP WOULD OPEN US TO CHARGES OF NON-COMPLIANCE WITH CSCE AT BELGRADE AND LIKELY DOMESTIC CRITICISM, AS WELL.) VISA REFUSAL IS A RELATIVELY MILD STEP WHICH THE GOC MIGHT NEUTRALIZE BY DELIBERATELY PROPOSING UNIMPORTANT TRAVELERS IN THE EXPECTATION OF REFUSAL. MORE IMPORTANT, THIS STEP IS NOW TOO LITTLE AND TOO LATE GIVEN RECENT DEVELOPMENTS. CONFIDENTIAL

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(B) POSTPONEMENT OR WITHDRAWAL OF ASST SECRETARY HARTMAN'S INVITATION TO SPACIL: WE COULD INFORM THE GOC THAT RECENT EVENTS PREJUDICIAL TO OUR JOURNALISTS HAVE CREATED AN ATMOSPHERE WHICH IS DEFINITELY NOT CONDUCIVE TO THE IMPROVEMENT IN BILATERAL RELATIONS WHICH WE HAD HOPED SPACIL'S VISIT WOULD HELP BRING ABOUT. GIVEN THE REGIME'S CURRENT SENSITIVITY TO WESTERN CRITICISM AND OSTRACISM STEMMING FROM THE CHARTER 77 GROUPS STRUGGLE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, WE COULD INFLICT SOME PAIN ON THE GOC BY THIS STEP AND SUCCEED IN PUBLICIZING MISTREATMENT OF OUR CORRESPONDENTS BY CITING IT PUBLICLY AS THE REASON FOR OUR MOVE.

(C) EXPULSION OF A CZECHOSLOVAK JOURNALIST RESIDENT IN THE US; THIS WOULD CLEARLY BE THE MOST DRASTIC ALTERNATIVE. THE NEWLY ARRIVED RUDE PRAVO CORRESPONDENT, MILAN JELINEK, WOULD BE AN OBVIOUS CANDIDATE. HOWEVER, SUBSEQUENT GOC RETALIATION AGAINST US WOULD BE ALMOST CERTAIN. SINCE NO NON-COMMUNIST US CORRESPONDENT LIVES HERE, THE GOC IS LIKELY TO REACT BY EXPELLING SOMEONE IN OUR EMBASSY, PERHAPS OUR PRESS OFFICER. (THE PANAM REPRESENTATIVE IS THE ONLY RESIDENT US BUSINESSMAN, BUT HE IS AN UNLIKELY RETALIATION TARGET FOR SEVERAL REASONS INCLUDING THE GOC'S INTEREST IN PRESERVING CIVIL TIES.) ALSO, THIS MOVE MIGHT WELL PROVOKE THE GOC INTO TREATING OUR CORRESPONDENTS MORE, NOT LESS, HARSHLY. AND IT MIGHT LEAD TO AN OVERALL WORSENING OF OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS.

8. WE RECOMMEND SERIOUS CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVES (B) OR (C), DEPENDING ON THE DEGREE TO WHICH DEPARTMENT WISHES TO REGISTER USG DISPLEASURE, AFTER TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE RAMIFICATIONS OF OUR RETALIATORY ACTION ON OVERALL US-GOC RELATIONS. BYRNE
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